

New Names

‘At [a] summer Olympics, a man was carrying a long pole through the Olympic village. A reporter came up to him and asked, “Are you a pole vaulter?” The man replied, “No, I’m a German, but how did you know my name was Walter?”’ // Or how about this one? ‘The teacher asked her class what each wanted to become when they grew up. “President”, “a fireman”, “a teacher”. One by one, they answered until it was Billy’s turn. The teacher asked, “Billy, what do you want to be when you grow up?” “Possible”, Billy responded. “Possible?” asked the teacher. “Yes”, Billy said, “my mom is always telling me I’m impossible. When I grow up I want to become *possible*”.’

Wouldn’t you whole-heartedly commend Billy? But his thinking is exactly what Father God does for us. For Christ Jesus has promised that He is personally going to give each and every one of us new names. He said in Revelation 2:17: “I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it”. The white stones may seem mysterious to us, but they were commonplace in the Roman world when Revelation was written. The white stones were often called “victory stones” because they were a trophy given to victors in sports games, to leaders of victorious

armies, etc. The stones would be inscribed with the victor's name. Showing the stones at important venues and events would give the victor access and also to receive special benefits of exclusive food, clothing, and luxury housing, all at the city's expense. Similar white stones were also given to pardoned criminals, while convicts carried black stones. White stones thus identified those who are guiltless and worthy to enter the Lamb's Heavenly City, and receive all its benefits. But of course it will have to have our special names on it, to identify to whom it belongs! Each of us! If we overcome in life on this earth, if we keep faith in Christ Jesus, He has promised that He will bring us to perfection, for He is both the "author and perfecter of [our] faith" as Hebrews 12:2 assures. Those white stones are our official Passports of the Kingdom of Christ Jesus. And they never expire!

When we each receive our new names, we will each personally understand why it's our new name, and marvel at its perfectness for each of us. For though our parents or those in charge of us at our birth, gave us our names, the only One truly qualified to name us is He Who knew us from before time began, eons before we were conceived, and Who "made all the delicate, inner parts of [our] bod[ies] and knit [us] together in [our] mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). Yet He delegated the ultimate earthly authority in naming persons and animals first to Adam and his descendants. We receive our names from others. That is the usual, traditional way. We don't name ourselves. Though nowadays,

people right and left see fit to change their names for all and sundry reasons. Sometimes, changing names multiple times a day, all depending on how they feel at any given moment. It matters not to them what gender their physical body presented at birth, for they will have surgeons transform it however they like, and sometimes back again. Even tyrannical politicians in the nation's capital (and many state capitals), have eliminated all references in official documents to gendered language.

Is this not the ultimate affront to God? Ignoring Him, even rebelling against Him is one thing. But to deny that He even made us, and that He had any part in creating us an individual human being, is the supreme slap on His face. And what did the "honorable" congressman, the Representative Jerry Nadler, Democrat of New York, declare on Thursday in response to Representative Greg Steube, Republican of Florida who had just read from the Holy Bible on the floor of the House of Representatives? Nadler's fiery response: "What any religious tradition describes as God's will is no concern of this Congress". Who among our Founding Fathers could have ever imagined such a statement being uttered in the hallowed halls of our nation's capitol?

The reality, as we all know, is that Father God has created each and every one of us, unique and individual, unlike any other, never repeated, each for as long or as short a physical life on this earth as He has determined. And He has given each of us a unique name, perfect for us, that will be revealed to us at the per-

fect time, and which we will each treasure forever and ever. Yet even while still on this earth, the Lord gives new names to those with specific and world-changing destinies. We see this repeatedly in the Scriptures. God either bestows new names, or directly tells the parents-to-be what they're to name their baby before it emerges from its mother's womb, or before it is even conceived. In the reading from Genesis, Abraham's son of the promise was given the name Isaac before he was conceived. We see the same with John the Baptist. And the supreme example of all when Mary was told by the angel Gabriel what to name the soon-to-be-conceived Lord Jesus Himself.

In Genesis 17 we read first of the new name given to "Eh-i-bruhm", actually "Abram". I became aware of how poorly American English pronounces Biblical names and words, and not just Biblical ones, but names and words from all sorts of foreign languages. At a Bible study in Japan back in 1977, I was confused when I heard people talking about "A-bu-ra-ha-mu". I knew "abu-ra" means oil, grease or fat, and "hamu" is the Japanese pronunciation for "ham", you know, those nice, delicious hunks of pork often enjoyed at Christmas and Resurrection Day dinners. It finally dawned on me they were speaking of "Eh-i-bruh-ham". But the Japanese pronunciation was actually far more faithful to the original, actual pronunciation of the Hebrew names than English was. Which is why I now prefer to try to accurately pronounce people's names, even people from ancient times. I mean, would you like

for your name to be mangled every time someone says it?

So Abram, which means “exalted father”, is given a new name by God in the initiation process of this great covenant between God and mankind, represented by the newly named Abraham. You notice the addition of the letter “h” in the new name. Now any feminists out there need raise no cain because God does not leave out the women! The same name change happens with Abraham’s wife, Sarai. She also receives an “h” in her name becoming Sarah. Both forms of her name mean “princess”. But what is this addition to each of their names that takes the form of an “h” in our English transliteration? The most accurate explanation is that God, who has just previously shared with Abraham another of His divine names, namely *El Shaddai*, meaning “Almighty God”, takes a letter from His Own personal name, called the Tetragrammaton, meaning it’s represented by four letters, in English, YHWH. Observant Jews never pronounce the name of God because it is too holy. And so whenever God’s personal name appears in the Bible, Jews reading aloud would immediately substitute the word for Sovereign Lord, “Adonai”, so as to avoid ever pronouncing God’s sacred name unworthily. I appreciate that custom, because it shows the proper respect for the name of the Creator and Lord of all the universe. I disagree with modern Christians who use God’s personal name as if it was just another proper name. To me, that’s flippant and presumptuous. Yes, God is All Love, but He is still God. And though we can crawl up into

His arms, and call Him, “Abba Daddy”, even children do not call their fathers by their proper names, do they? Or should they?

So, here with both Abraham and Sarah, God inserts one of the “h”s in His name, the Hebrew letter *hei*. He gives the first *hei* to Abram, in a sense, giving a divine element to Abram’s name. Thus no longer is he just an earthly “exalted father”, he is now the “father of many nations”. The letter *hei* is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and that Biblical number means “grace”. And for Sarai, God gives her name the second *hei* of the divine name. Furthermore, the letter *hei* is pronounced with a strong breathing sound, representing the sound of life, of breathing, when it is pronounced. In this way, both Abram and Sarai, in the changes to their names, receive new life from God as they are subsequently to join together again as husband and wife and form new life that will become Isaac. “Isaac” means laughter. And this is not referring just to the fact that both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they heard God prophesy that they would have a son together. Remember this was thirteen years after Ishmael, whose mother was the slave woman Hagar, was born. Isaac brings joy and laughter to his parents, and not least also to God Himself.

Imagine what joy and laughter your new name will bring both to yourself and to the Lord Jesus when He bestows it on you! No longer *Impossible* but now *Possible*, your new name is engraved on your sparkling white stone passport, giving you free run of all the grounds and palaces of Heaven!

